



ART INDUSTRIES
AT
SOUTH KENSINGTON.

No. II.
THE SOUTH KENSINGTON SCHOOL OF ART.

Reprinted by permission from the "*Times*" of the 4th October
1872.

LONDON: 1873.



THE UNIVERSITY OF

CHICAGO

LIBRARY

OF

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

LIBRARY

OF

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE
SOUTH KENSINGTON SCHOOL
OF ART.

Reprinted by permission from the "*Times*" of the 4th October
1872.

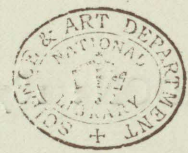
LONDON : 1873.

317

JOHN R. MONTGOMERY

OF ART.

JOHN R. MONTGOMERY



8. 10. 73.

THE SOUTH KENSINGTON SCHOOL OF ART.

 IN an article published at the beginning of the year (February 12th) we gave an account of some of the industries which flourish in connection with the Government School of Art at South Kensington. Our purpose was to show how far, by the patronage of art, the Lords of the Council had served the cause of the public; how far, especially, it had contributed to the solution of that oft-propounded problem, the employment of women. The encouraging account we were able to give of the results achieved in this direction naturally leads us to consider further the system of Government art teaching, and on the present occasion we propose to narrate its method, and to discover what practical work—that is, what work belonging to the world and not to the class room—is being and has been done by the male students. It is upon the results which follow its dealings with these that the system must stake its reputation, for the instruction of women in art is at present rather an interesting and philanthropic experiment than a productive labour. In the article which we devoted to this part of the subject we showed, indeed, that women were already painting china and constructing mosaic, that in both these art manufactures their
work

Instruction of Women.

work was admirable, and that new industries, capable of extension, had been established. But, as we said, these new industries, however successfully pursued, are confined to the precincts of South Kensington, and, though there is every reason to hope that they may soon be transplanted out of doors, they are at present but tender plants, requiring the nurture of the parent hand.



THE instruction of women in art is a piece of philanthropy we must not grumble at paying for, so that it show fair promise of future profit to themselves and to us. It has met with hopeful success at South Kensington, and may be fairly urged as one of the reasons for the liberal maintenance of that institution. But however encouraging its aspects, the teaching of women is not, and can never be, the chief business at the head quarters of national art, or even at the branch schools, and the system of Government art instruction must seek to justify itself and its cost chiefly by what it achieves with the male students. Here we will be satisfied with no philanthropic intention, with no prospect of ultimate advantage, with nothing short of solid and immediate gain. The reason of this is not that the State leans more to the side of the men than of the women, but in the first place, that the art-tutelage of each sex stands upon an entirely different footing from that of the other ; and, in the second place, that when all is said and done, it must be owned that the work of the world, whether in art or otherwise, is done by men, and that a subsidized system of art education which only devoted its attention to, or was only successful with, women, could never result in any great and permanent gain to the community. The reason why the art education of each sex stands upon

Art Students generally.

upon a different footing is plain enough. In taking a hundred women of any class and teaching them art, we take them from nothing in particular, and should the work which they are taught to do turn out unproductive, the Government have wasted so much money in a philanthropic experiment, but the community is no worse off. A philanthropic experiment has been tried, and has failed, that is all. But with the men the case is different. Their education has been diverted into an abnormal channel, and they have been withdrawn from trades and pursuits in which they would certainly have done good work. It is not to be supposed that art students are remnants of humanity who would have failed in life if the Government had not captured them and taught them to paint and model; they are rather the pick of their class, men or lads of exceptional abilities and perseverance, who would probably have done well if left to their ordinary avocations. For these reasons the system of art education established throughout the kingdom must justify itself rather by what it does for its male than for its female students. In relation to the former, it must show itself to have a practical bearing on the industries of the country, a bearing which is also immediate and certain, not remote and uncertain. When it can be shown that this is the case, that the great increase of late years in the quantity and quality of our arts and manufactures is partly and perceptibly due to the Government Schools of Art, then and then only will these schools have justified the great item of their actual cost and the greater item of their indirect cost, that of the working strength which they divert from its ordinary application. In order that we may arrive at this knowledge in an intelligible fashion, let us first relate the method of instruction which is pursued.

We

Career of an Art Student.



WE cannot do this better than by tracing the career of an art student. He is probably the son of a small tradesman, and at eight or nine years old goes to the National School of his town. Here he has the opportunity of learning drawing, and his teachers have a money inducement to teach it to him. We will suppose that he has a turn that way, and that he becomes a fair adept, after a schoolboy fashion, not only at geometrical and perspective, but also at freehand drawing. By the time he leaves school he has won several prizes, and has acquired some liking for if little knowledge of art, and continues his work at a night class, to which he is admitted "on payment of fees within the reach of persons who support themselves by manual labour." He competes for other sets of prizes, and by-and-by passes into the school of art proper. Of these schools there are in the United Kingdom that at South Kensington and 109 others. At South Kensington the teachers for the whole are trained and the education of the "national scholars" perfected. In due course our student wins a National Scholarship, and this brings him up to South Kensington where he studies with a Government allowance of from 1*l.* to 2*l.* a week, varying according to his standing in the school, and the nature of the certificates he has gained. Or our student, if he wishes to come altogether under the Government yoke, and not merely to instruct himself for his own advantage in some chosen pursuit, may—for we suppose him to have ability enough to do anything—go into training as a teacher, and win certain certificates, in which case he will also receive a self-supporting allowance, and in due time will be appointed to teach in some country school the knowledge he has acquired at South Kensington. The work done in the male classes is divided into successive stages, and the students who do it into
three

Prizes for success in Examinations.

three classes—firstly, those in training at the public expense for Masterships in the art schools; secondly, those receiving, also at the public expense, an education which will fit them to become art workmen in some branch of industry; and thirdly, a class paying fees and studying as designers, etc., with a view to their own profit or pleasure. It is from this last class in London and the Provinces that the other two are recruited; the “National Scholarships” and the free training for Masterships being the prizes of success in the various examinations. We find the students in the male school passing first of all through an elementary class, and then working “from the round” in chalk and monochrome, thus gaining some idea of light and shade and of the use of colour. Then we get to a class working in tempera colour at encaustic tile and wall-paper designs, which have no value in themselves except as teaching the workers how to fill in a given space with some symmetry of arrangement and balance of parts. In the next stage the students begin to paint in various colours from natural objects. There is little “copying” in these classes, and we find the youngest students doing their best to put on paper the sprig of ivy which stands in a tumbler before them, or painting from veritable apples, nuts, bunches of grapes, a sod of grass, and so on. Then comes “drawing from the antique” in a room round the walls of which are ranged a fine collection of plaster casts from Greek and Roman marbles. Here students of the three classes reproduce in crayon, chalk, and monochrome the divinest shapes of ancient art—the Theseus from the pediment of the Parthenon, worn by the weather and pitted by Turkish bullets, but still exquisitely beautiful, the Venus of Milo, and other famous statues. Sitting at work surrounded by these, not only does the hand become skilful, but the mind is insensibly educated.

Work for the Prize Competitions.

educated into clear and just art-perceptions. In this room are casts from life of arms, feet, doubled fists, etc., and from it we pass to the "life" room, where students paint and draw from the clothed and nude figure. The next stage brings us to the "architectural and mechanical drawing" classes, in which students can acquire the knowledge necessary to prepare them for architects' and engineers' offices. Magnificent buildings, in number sufficient to furnish forth the capitals of half a dozen Empires, are here designed. The work is done well and thoroughly, every edifice being planned throughout on every floor. The next room is devoted to "advanced painting" from fruit and flowers, vases, shells, tankards, etc.; and here we find students hard at work for the prize competitions. An etching class copies objects in the Museum, learning the art, and spreading the knowledge of the contents of the Museum; for the etchings are gathered into books and circulated among the country schools. The students lay their own grounds, "bite in" and print their own plates, and on off days work on their own account. They have formed a club among themselves, and we have been shown some most excellent etchings of river and rural scenes. The course of art education finishes in the "modelling" class, by whom the 6 ft. decorative panels for the Wedgwood Memorial at Burslem have been designed and executed. A statue of Wedgwood himself, the decorative pediment over the doorway, and some large medallions representing the months, all for the same building, are also the work of the students. This class competes for prizes offered by the Plasterers' Company.



HE general students pay each 10*l.* a year in fees, and the National Scholars and the Students in Training for teachers absorb about 2,500*l.* a year in allowances.

The

Water Colour Studies.

The last class go through the whole course, but the others more especially devote themselves to studies which will help them in the vocations they have in view. Last half-year, the total number of male students at South Kensington was 383, about an average number. Of these 124 were new students, and 139 belonged to the free classes. An entrance examination instituted this year has checked the admissions, and considerably lowered the numbers of the students, bringing the males down to the above number from 466, their total at this time last year, and decreasing the female students from 398 to 313. The work done by each student in training is kept in a separate portfolio, and turning over that of one student, we find that his two and a half years' course has accumulated a vast quantity of very various material. There is an elaborate drawing, from measurement, of part of the New Foreign Office; there are designs, complete in plan, section, and elevation, for Grammar schools, which won him the sixth certificate. There is figure drawing, done at night, from the antique; there are heads in crayon; there is a vast quantity of geometrical drawing, showing an infinite variety of projection of shadow, and intersection and perforation of solids. This student, who is a pupil teacher, during part of his time, in the architectural class-room, has also been busy at water-colour studies in still life, from fruit and growing plants. He has painted much in "botanical analysis," copying the normal growth, and parts, even on a microscopic scale, of plants, thus gathering instruction from nature for the designing of fabrics. All this, and more, has fitted him to teach art generally in a country school. Another student has been a national scholar, studying art with a view towards becoming a designer in textile fabrics, and we find his portfolio full of pencil sketches from objects in the Museum and growing plants

in

Decorative Art at South Kensington.

in the Horticultural Gardens, of outline studies in pencil done from casts of the figure, of copies of friezes, of "botanical analysis" drawing, and of a thousand and one studies of ornament in chalk. Females are trained as general students, and study chiefly with the intent of turning their talents to account as governesses.



THE courts and corridors of South Kensington are full of work, and much of it very beautiful work, well worth careful inspection, done by the students, either during their course of study or after it, when they have been engaged at good wages to design and model, to paint on porcelain, wood or other material. With a few exceptions, all the decorative art at South Kensington has been, or is being, done by the students. In the refreshment-rooms, the South Court, and on the staircases, there are pillars, panels, and ceilings which may claim a visitor's attention equally with the contents of the Museum. In the Competition Gallery the upper part of the wall is decorated with lunettes, some of which are after designs by Yeames, Marks, Leslie, Pickersgill, and others by Messrs. Godfrey Sykes and Moody, two of the most distinguished students the School of Art has produced, while the reproduction, in full size, of all the designs is the work of the students. These panels, in the actual beauty of the figures, as well as in the excellence of the execution, are real works of high art. Mr. F. W. Moody, an ex-student and the chief decorative artist employed in the Museum, is possessed of some original and a very great deal of adaptive power. His works in stained glass, decorated ceilings, woodcarving, etc., are to be found in all parts of the Museum, and do honour to him and to those who taught him. The decoration of the arches over the

Results of the Teaching.

the gallery of the South Court, and of the north staircase windows and ceiling, is home made. The figures in mosaic on the walls of the South Court were most of them executed by the female students, and some of them designed by the male. The decoration of two of the three refreshment-rooms is the product of the schools, the designs on the panels of the grill room having been done in small by Mr. Poynter and enlarged by the students.



O much for the work in the Museum. Various and excellent as it is, and some of it novel and wonderful in its way, we must look beyond it for the results we are in search of. We are not content that, like "bold Longinus," South Kensington's

"Own example strengthens all its laws,
"And is itself that great sublime it draws,"

but we remember that a museum is one thing and the world is another, and we look to see what has been done beyond its doors. This inquiry cannot be answered as completely as is desirable. When once a national scholar has completed his course and gone out into the world, there is no longer any tie between him and the institution which has educated him, and it is only by chance that anything can be gathered about his career. In our opinion it is a great pity that this should be the case. It is of the highest importance to know what part the large number of students who pass out of the schools year by year are playing in the world, whether the knowledge acquired during their studentship continues to be of value to them, and, more especially, whether it is of value in the trades and manufactures of the country. We do not see why the
course

Offices filled by ex-Students of the Schools.

course of art study at South Kensington and in the country schools should not culminate in some sort of degree or certificate, which would not only be of value to the student himself, but would require a register to be kept, which would itself be a continual indication of results. At present it is quite impossible to know at all completely or exactly what work is being done by the thousands of students who have passed from the schools into the world. Fortunately, however, enough is known in a chance way to give us satisfaction for the past and great encouragement for the future.



To give these results in the fragmentary manner in which only we have been able to arrive at them, we may begin by saying that some of the best men in Sir Gilbert Scott's Office have been South Kensington students. We all know how great a share of the work of a great and fashionable architect falls to those under him, and it will surprise no one to hear that Messrs. Edgar and Philip, late National Scholars, designed and executed the *podium* of the Albert Memorial. The Outram Shield was designed and chased by an ex-student, Mr. Armstead; but Mr. Godfrey Sykes was, perhaps, the best man ever produced by South Kensington. He died in 1865, too young, but not before he had done a great deal of work; for to him is due the terracotta modelling now carried on at the schools with such success. Among the country schools, that at Sheffield stands conspicuous. It has sent many clever lads up to London, and has greatly developed modelling in metal-work, electro-plating, etc. Mr. Stevens, the sculptor of the Wellington Monument, was a scholar of that school. The lace manufacturers have drawn many designers from the Nottingham school, and old art-students

Improvement in British Pottery.

art-students are to be found filling important posts, and doing good work in the painting rooms of many of the great pottery firms. The beauty and variety of design which now characterize British pottery is in no small degree due to South Kensington, and that manufacturers recognize the good to be derived thence is proved by the fact that not only our own Nottingham and London, but even French firms find it worth their while to offer prizes to be competed for by the students. Our own upholsterers and cabinet-makers have frequently as designers and superintendents, men who have passed through the Government Schools of Art ; these are to be found working for such firms as Messrs. Gillows, Holland, and Jackson and Graham. Twenty-five years ago mechanical draughtsmen were almost invariably foreign, but now architects' and other offices are full of ex-Government students. Though the teaching at South Kensington is rather opposed to purely artistic work and leans towards applied decoration, the students' classes at the Royal Academy receive thence some of their best recruits, a dozen or so every session. From the Training School students have been sent as Instructors in Art, not only to the home schools, but to India, to the Cape of Good Hope, to the Mauritius, and to America, and among those who have passed out of the National Scholar Class we find students who have secured engagements as designers in cabinet work, terra-cotta, carpets, damasks, chandeliers, etc., and as medallists, house decorators, and glass painters, at salaries varying from 130*l.* to 300*l.* per annum. The earnings of students in training who become masters in the Government schools average about 300*l.* a year.



EDUCATED men seldom occur among the students, who are chiefly drawn from the small tradesmen class, while

Object of the Teaching.

while some of the most successful have at the beginning of their career been no more, perhaps, than plumbers' and glaziers' apprentices. Of course there are exceptions, a good number of officers in the army, for instance, having studied in the South Kensington Schools, but the real working students are drawn from the lower middle class, and are persons who are rising in life, who are climbing, not descending, the social ladder in search of new means of support. This art-teaching is free from the religious and class difficulties which interfere with other instruction, and the spectacle of four or five hundred students of various ranks in life and various religions studying and competing peacefully together, and all alike proud to achieve distinction and win the prizes which are offered alike to all, is one which cannot be paralleled in any other branch of education. Among the female students are many who belong to the upper middle class, but the bulk of them study for the purely commercial purpose of turning to solid account the talents they possess. Many of the male students transform themselves from ordinary working men into professional artists. Thus a button die-sinker of 20 years of age came up to South Kensington from Birmingham, went through the Schools as a National Scholar, and is now a medallist at Messrs. Wyon's.



THE object of the art-teaching at South Kensington is not, and ought not to be, to give students different educations for particular trades, but to offer them all the same general art-education, though they may, of course, pursue this with some bias towards the particular vocation they may have chosen for themselves. Lord Bacon declared it to be his highest ambition to bring philosophy down from the stars, to make it a home among men, and to give it a useful part in

Tendency of Modern Art.

in human affairs. The whole endeavour of an art education, paid for by the nation, should be to do for art what Bacon proposed to do for philosophy. It cannot be denied that modern art has too much tendency to become a separate craft, and that modern artists have too much tendency to traverse exclusive paths; disdaining to walk in the footsteps of the great masters they affect to venerate. When art was at its greatest, its highest practical purpose was held to be the decoration of buildings. Raphael and Michael Angelo were decorative artists, but most of our Academicians would be much too proud to own such a designation. South Kensington has certainly done good work in breaking down in some measure this modern prejudice, in bringing art into daily use for the things of daily life, and in inducing artists to connect their labour with some practical purpose. This year Mr. Leighton has exhibited paintings for two lunettes of the South Kensington competition gallery, and we hope year by year to see more of such work. One consequence of our painters confining themselves to work which has no alliance with anything beyond the gilt border in which it is framed is that the decoration of St. Paul's Cathedral has now come to us as something new and strange and altogether bewildering, something which nobody seems well to know how to set about. If by inducing great artists to turn their genius to works of a practical and decorative character, and by filling the shops and manufactories of the country with well-instructed art workmen and designers, the South Kensington system can help to draw art and artists down from the separate heaven they have been too fond of inhabiting, and can persuade them to concern themselves with extraneous and every-day matters; if it can make them, in the highest sense of the word, decorative artists, such as was many a great old master, and especially

Suggestion of Certificate in Art Knowledge.

especially the painter of those wondrous cartoons which now very fitly find their place in a museum of applied art ; if it can do this, it is well worthy of the public support which it now receives. We have been able to show that the widespread system of which South Kensington is the centre has not only endeavoured, but has certainly already contributed towards this end. The public are greatly interested in following its working, and, in order to give them the fullest means of doing so, we would repeat our suggestion of some degree or certificate in art knowledge which would necessitate a register of the names, addresses, and occupations of all students who had passed through the Government schools. The authorities at South Kensington would thus be able from time to time to publish returns, from which the public could at a glance judge of the value of the system, of its growth, and of the part it was playing in our trades and manufactures. At present there are no such returns, and it is only by special inquiry, and by the aid, freely given, of the officers of the Schools, that we have arrived at the facts now laid before our readers.



No. 1. WORK OF FEMALE STUDENTS.

No. 2. THE SOUTH KENSINGTON SCHOOL OF ART.